

1 July 2019

Mrs J Billinge  
Headteacher  
Devonshire Park Primary School  
Temple Road  
Birkenhead  
Merseyside  
CH42 9JX

Dear Mrs Billinge

### **Short inspection of Devonshire Park Primary School**

Following my visit to the school on 12 June 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in July 2015.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your ambition and high expectations are shared by leaders, staff and governors. This contributes to an effective team that is committed to ensuring that pupils receive a high standard of education. You have created a caring and supportive environment. This allows pupils to develop as learners, living up to the school motto as a 'place to learn and grow'.

Parents who spoke to me, and those who accessed Ofsted's online questionnaire, commented very positively about the school. The vast majority of parents would recommend the school to others. Parents value the help that you give to the whole family when needed, particularly those in challenging circumstances. Parents appreciate the many activities provided for their children, particularly the recent opportunity to perform with the school choir at the Echo Arena alongside other schools. Parents also feel well informed about the progress that their children make. Parents of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) who attend the resource base provision appreciate the support that their children receive. A parent who spoke to me commented: 'I can't thank staff enough for the help and support they have given. School is like a family, and it's the little things they do that show how much they care.'

Good relationships fostered by adults in school contribute well to pupils' positive attitudes to learning. Pupils are also polite and well mannered. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about the range of clubs available, for example in sports, art and the times tables club. Pupils spoke passionately about geography club, where they are developing an understanding of the impact of pollution on the planet. Older pupils take their responsibilities seriously as role models for younger pupils, and as

members of committees. Pupils feel valued and listened to by adults in school. Pupils are actively campaigning to ensure that parking around school does not put pupils walking to school in danger. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to broaden their horizons through residential trips and visits, especially disadvantaged pupils. Pupils have aspirations to be news reporters, teachers, scientists and to work with animals. Pupils enjoy learning because teachers make the experience engaging and interesting.

During the inspection, I followed up several key lines of enquiry. These included the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Professional development is given a high priority. You have developed a culture of professional dialogue between staff. Leaders ensure that staff have the knowledge and understanding that they need to support pupils' learning effectively, particularly pupils with SEND. Staff appreciate the opportunity to share knowledge and expertise with colleagues, including colleagues in other schools. Leaders routinely check on the quality of teaching and review the progress that pupils make in their learning. Leaders challenge staff effectively and provide support when necessary. As a result, the quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Safeguarding is given a high priority. Leaders ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. There are effective checks to make sure that all adults in school are safe to work with children. The high-quality training that staff receive enables them to quickly identify any signs of neglect or abuse. Safeguarding arrangements are understood well by staff. All records are detailed and securely kept.

Leaders work effectively with charities and other agencies to ensure that pupils and families receive additional guidance and support when necessary. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations. For example, they learn about road safety and keeping safe when they are using the internet.

Pupils understand the different forms that bullying can take. Pupils who spoke with me commented that any incidents are dealt with quickly by staff. They said that teachers help them to make the right choices about how they behave towards others. Pupils feel safe in school. They said that they were confident that there would always be someone to talk with if they had any worries or concerns. Pupils appreciate the presence of Dodger, the school's trained social and emotional support dog. Pupils explained how he helps them to feel calm when they are anxious.

### **Inspection findings**

- You have worked to resolve the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection in writing and mathematics. Leaders' evaluation identified gaps in pupils' knowledge, particularly in pupils' vocabulary, knowledge, grammar and spelling. This was hindering progress in their writing. Training for staff on the

changes in how reading and writing are taught ensures that learning opportunities build progressively on pupils' prior knowledge. Carefully selected texts are used effectively to support pupils' knowledge and understanding in other curriculum subjects. Teachers use assessment information effectively. Pupils who are struggling get the help that they need from skilled support staff. Leaders monitor the quality of teaching and provide support and coaching for teachers where necessary. Teachers check their judgements with colleagues, including colleagues in other schools. Pupils take pride in their achievements. They know what they need to do to improve their work further. Work in pupils' books is well presented. It shows that pupils are now making strong progress from their starting points. The quality of pupils' writing across the wider curriculum is also beginning to improve.

- In mathematics, training for staff ensures that they plan activities that allow pupils to develop mathematical concepts effectively. Work in pupils' books shows that they are able to apply their mathematical knowledge when solving increasingly complex problems and explaining their reasoning. Leaders check that actions to improve the teaching of mathematics are applied consistently across the school. Teachers use assessment information well to ensure that learning activities meet pupils' needs well and provide appropriate challenge. Current pupils are making strong progress. However, it is too soon to see the impact of these improvements on published data at the end of key stage 2, particularly at the higher standard.
- Next, we looked at how you support disadvantaged pupils to overcome their barriers to learning. You have identified that social, emotional and mental health difficulties are a key barrier for an increasing proportion of pupils who often struggle to regulate their emotions. You work collaboratively with charities and other agencies to ensure that vulnerable pupils and their families receive appropriate support. Pupils are supported well by highly skilled staff, including the resident counsellor in school. Staff provide effective nurture and guidance for identified pupils. This enhances their well-being and attitudes to learning and is beginning to have a positive impact on the progress that pupils make.
- Poor language and communication skills hinder pupils' progress. This is especially the case for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders work with a range of professionals and other agencies to provide training for staff. As a result, staff are able to support pupils' spoken language and communication skills effectively. Staff use assessment information well to identify the precise gaps in pupils' language development. Staff provide the help and support that pupils need to catch up by the end of key stage 1. Engagement activities with parents ensure that they are beginning to develop the skills that they need to support their children's learning, for example workshops on reading aloud to their children and establishing routines at home.
- I was also interested to see how you support pupils with SEND to be able to reach the potential of which they are capable. You are proactive in ensuring that all pupils with SEND receive high-quality support. This includes those who do not attend the three resource base provisions in school. Leaders work collaboratively with other professionals to access training and resources to support pupils' needs effectively. Skilled staff have the knowledge and understanding that they need to

support pupils' individual needs well. Leaders liaise with other schools to ensure that information is shared as pupils enter and leave the school. This helps pupils to settle quickly into school. Detailed records show that pupils are making at least expected progress from their starting points. Parents commented very positively on the help and support provided by you and your staff. Parents are pleased with the progress that their children make.

- We also reviewed how you are improving outcomes for children in the early years. Children join the school with skills and knowledge below those typical for their age. Leaders are beginning to develop further the range of initiatives for parents and carers before their children start in Reception so that they have the knowledge and skills to support their children with their learning and the progress that they make. Leaders are beginning to share ideas and information with parents about how they can help to prepare their children for learning. Leaders are improving their engagement with the large number of local early years settings that children attend before starting in Reception. Leaders are beginning to share information effectively, particularly about the increasing proportion of children with SEND and disadvantaged children.
- Leaders in the early years have a good understanding of how children learn. Teachers use the assessment information they gather from a range of evidence, including from parents, to identify the next steps in children's learning. Teachers plan activities that capture children's interests and love of learning. This includes trips and visits to enrich the learning in school. Training for staff enables them to support children's language and ability to communicate clearly, including children with SEND. Staff in the part-time provision correct children's mispronunciations sensitively. Staff use questions to encourage the children to talk and develop their language. Positive relationships are fostered well by staff. This has an impact on children's positive attitudes to learning. Children chat happily together, for example sharing and taking turns while playing a missing number game independently. Evidence seen during the inspection shows that an increasing proportion of children are on track to achieve a good level of development by the end of the academic year.
- Finally, we discussed the actions that you have taken to improve attendance, particularly for pupils who are persistently absent from school. Attendance is monitored carefully, particularly for the most vulnerable pupils. Staff take swift action, including phone calls and visits to pupils' homes if pupils do not arrive at school on time. You know your families very well. Staff work to build trust and develop positive relationships. You work effectively with charities, other agencies and professionals. Leaders work with other schools to share good practice and expertise. You have introduced initiatives to improve attendance, for example, vouchers and certificates to reward good attendance. The breakfast club is well attended and provides pupils with a healthy breakfast and a calm start to the day. Pupils know that it is important to attend school every day. Their overall attendance continues to improve and is in line with national averages. However, despite these improvements, a proportion of pupils are persistently absent from school.

## **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- continue to improve attendance for pupils who are persistently absent from school
- develop further the activities provided for children and families in the early years, so that parents have the skills and knowledge that they need to support their children to make progress
- continue to build on the positive strategies to support disadvantaged pupils in overcoming their barriers to learning
- continue to build on the improvement to the teaching of English, so that it has more impact on the quality of pupils' writing across the wider curriculum
- build on the positive changes to the teaching of mathematics by the end of key stage 2, particularly at the higher standard.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wirral. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Amanda Stringer  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Information about the inspection**

During this inspection, I met with you and other members of the leadership team, and I met with staff. I also spoke with members of the board of governors and a representative from the local authority. I visited classrooms with you, where we had the opportunity to speak with pupils about their learning and to look at their work. I also met with a group of pupils formally and listened to pupils read. I spoke with parents at the start of the school day and considered the 26 free-text comments and the 40 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents. I also considered the 32 responses to the staff questionnaire and the single response to the pupil questionnaire. I scrutinised a range of documentation, including the single central record and risk assessments for safeguarding.